Frequently asked questions for Latin class from Back to School Night

**Is there anything I can do to help my child progress in Latin class?**

**How can we support our child’s progress at home?**

**What can we do outside of Latin class to encourage our son to build his Latin skills?**

Every year, the most frequently asked question by parents is how they can help their budding scholars when they don’t know any Latin themselves. I think one issue is that Latin has an intimidation factor for most folks. You may have heard of the stereotype of a stern-faced Latin teacher drilling students on declensions from dusty old grammar books. Hopefully this connotation will be dispelled in a few weeks when your child comes home to tell you that “Latin class is SO fun!” or “It’s not so bad” or something remotely positive like that.

But back to the question, the best thing you can do is to make sure your child is reading the directions and completing his/her homework thoroughly. We aren’t translating *The Aeneid* in 5th grade Latin, and I think you will find most of the exercises are simple to follow along and support them in completing it. Students can also complete most assignments on schoology.com, so making sure they review their work and make corrections when needed is also beneficial.

More?

1. If your child is struggling to understand a concept you feel is beyond your expertise, tutorial is a great time to review concepts or expand a lesson from the day. Please encourage your child to take advantage of this time.

2. If you are looking for even more expansion and challenge, I am hosting a **Certamen Club** during elective period – the second elective session will focus on new, younger club members. This is a Latin quiz bowl type club – we will learn advanced material and practice quizzing each other on all sorts of classical knowledge in order to compete in Certamen tournaments.

**What will students learn by the end of the year?**

Please see the table of contents at the front of the Latin workbook – this gives a good overview of what we will cover for vocabulary, grammar, history, culture, and beyond.

**How long should students be spending on memrise.com?**

Students are asked to earn 5000 points on Memrise for each unit. They have about 3 weeks to earn this amount. Depending on the student, earning 5000 points should take about 30-60 minutes total. They can break this up into chunks – e.g. 5-10 minutes a night – or complete it in one setting. They are sometimes given class time as well during station days and can earn points then. It is important to make sure that the time they spend on Memrise is used responsibly and productively – focused on practicing vocabulary instead of updating a profile picture.

Because Memrise does not provide detailed feedback, I may soon be switching to a new start-up website called ClassTracks which provides me with the feedback of what words students struggle to learn.

**How long should students spend on schoology?**

Most homework assignments can be completed either in the workbook or on schoology. Each assignment should take between 10-20 minutes to complete. The amount varies depending on the student and if they need to make any corrections. They may also use schoology as a study tool before a quiz day – retaking former assignments to test themselves on the material.

**Do the students learn to write as well as speak in Latin?**

This is actually a really hot debate topic in the Latin teaching world right now. Traditionally, Latin has been taught with the emphasis on writing and reading. Lately, there is a trend for more Latin immersion type classes. Advocates argue that this approach helps students absorb the vocabulary better. Opponents argue that it takes away time that could be used to discuss the Latin roots’ relationship to English, and cultural topics have to be simplified if you are using a full-immersion model.

My course is mainly focused on learning to read and write Latin in order that we can relate the vocabulary to English derivatives and learn basic grammar. It is not as heavy on the verbal components as a modern language class would be, and students will probably not have full conversations in Latin by the end of the year. However, I like to incorporate speaking components when possible with skits and simple descriptions of scenes later on. So far we have reviewed Latin pronunciation and conversational phrases that we can use in the classroom.

**How do you know how to pronounce Latin words?**

Great question! Here’s the deal – there are four different methods of pronunciation which reflect different times in history – none are necessarily wrong, though some hot-headed purists may disagree. But how do we know how the Romans said it? Well, young little Romans learned to read and write Latin too – and we have their ancient grammar books! If you want more details, here is a great linguistic paper on the topic: <http://www.ai.uga.edu/mc/latinpro.pdf>

**In the first person singular, why do you turn the “a” into an “o”?**

Hmmm. I answer with another question: when forming some plurals in English, why do we turn the “y” into an “i” and add “es”? As in “puppy > puppies”? There is a linguistic answer to both these questions which would involve a long technical answer on the evolution of language, but the simple answer is that it is just the way it is because someone decided so a long time ago.

Or as someone clever once pointed out, “*Every* word is a made-up word.”

**Why is Latin important for my child’s future?**

The head of our department wrote an insightful piece on that very question. You can access it here: <http://latinpcs.org/programs/curriculum/why-latin>

Also, we spent a day in Latin class discussing its benefits. I’d encourage you to ask your child about it and review our notes called “Why are we studying a dead language?” in their Latin workbooks (page 15) and the introduction (pages 2-3).

**When will you begin to use Latin to help with word definition?**

August 31, 2015 ☺ We discuss English derivatives with every new vocabulary word!

**Is Latin dead or alive?**

This is the essential question of the year, and students will have a debate about it in the spring. Technically, according to the linguistic definition, *a language is alive if it changes* – words are added, nuances, etc. So according to the linguistic definition, yes, Classical Latin is dead. BUT to think outside the technical response, one should also consider phrases, derivatives, and ways Latin is incorporated into English – not to mention that Romance languages are an evolved form of Latin. This is what I would like students to do – to realize how Latin is used in the world around us and decide by the end of the year if they think it is alive or dead and how this label impacts our study of it.

Personally, I like to call it a Zombie language – but that’s just me.

**How did you become interested in Latin teaching?**

I started taking Latin in high school – honestly, because at the time 1) modern languages requiring the ability to roll your “r’s” and make other unfamiliar sounds – frightened me; and 2) I loved everything about the classical world – mythology, history – everything.

I continued taking Latin in college and switched majors at least 4 times – undecided, dramaturgy, Celtic Studies, and finally decided on a dual degree in “Letters” (a rounded humanities degree with languages, philosophy, history, and literature) and “Classics” – which would allow me to pursue all my varied interests. Throughout the five years that I spent academically wandering, I was consistently drawn to Classics courses and still had no idea what I wanted to be when I graduated. One of my best friends, who is now a phenomenal Latin teacher in Oklahoma City, encouraged me to take a “Latin Teaching” course with her, and I did. And I loved it. And then I got my first job teaching Latin to 6th, 7th, and 8th graders at a private school in Oklahoma City. And I loved that too. And now I’m in my sixth year teaching Latin at WLPCS. So – that’s how. ☺

**What’s a good resource for non-Latin speakers to use?**

Here is my handy-doody guide for how you can learn Latin:

1. **Learn Latin with your child.** Starting from the beginning, take about 15 minutes each week to review our notes and handouts. This will help you have a general grasp on Latin grammar and the vocabulary we are learning in class.

\*\*\* Extra Credit – tell your child that you want to join the Latin fun wagon too and ask them to teach you a short lesson each day. This is a great way for them to review the material as well! You can take turns drilling each other on vocabulary and LYCU phrases.

\*\*\* You are welcome to create a memrise.com or schoology account for yourself and join our courses.

Memrise: search for our course – WLPCS 5th Grade Latin

Schoology access code: SCDWJ-B9CBW

2. Check out **the youtube channel for Latin Tutorials:** [**https://www.youtube.com/user/latintutorial**](https://www.youtube.com/user/latintutorial)- It’s a thorough introduction video course with an engaging narrator and graphics.

3. **Books!**

Minimus – These are the textbooks that I used previously to teach 5th grade Latin – I have plenty available if you would like to borrow a copy.

Wheelock’s Latin– For those who enjoy straight-forward material and want to have it all in one book, this is the classic textbook of college Latin studies and will take you all the way from “Salve” to passive periphrastic constructions and beyond.

**I hope this has been helpful and informative! Thank you for some really great questions!**